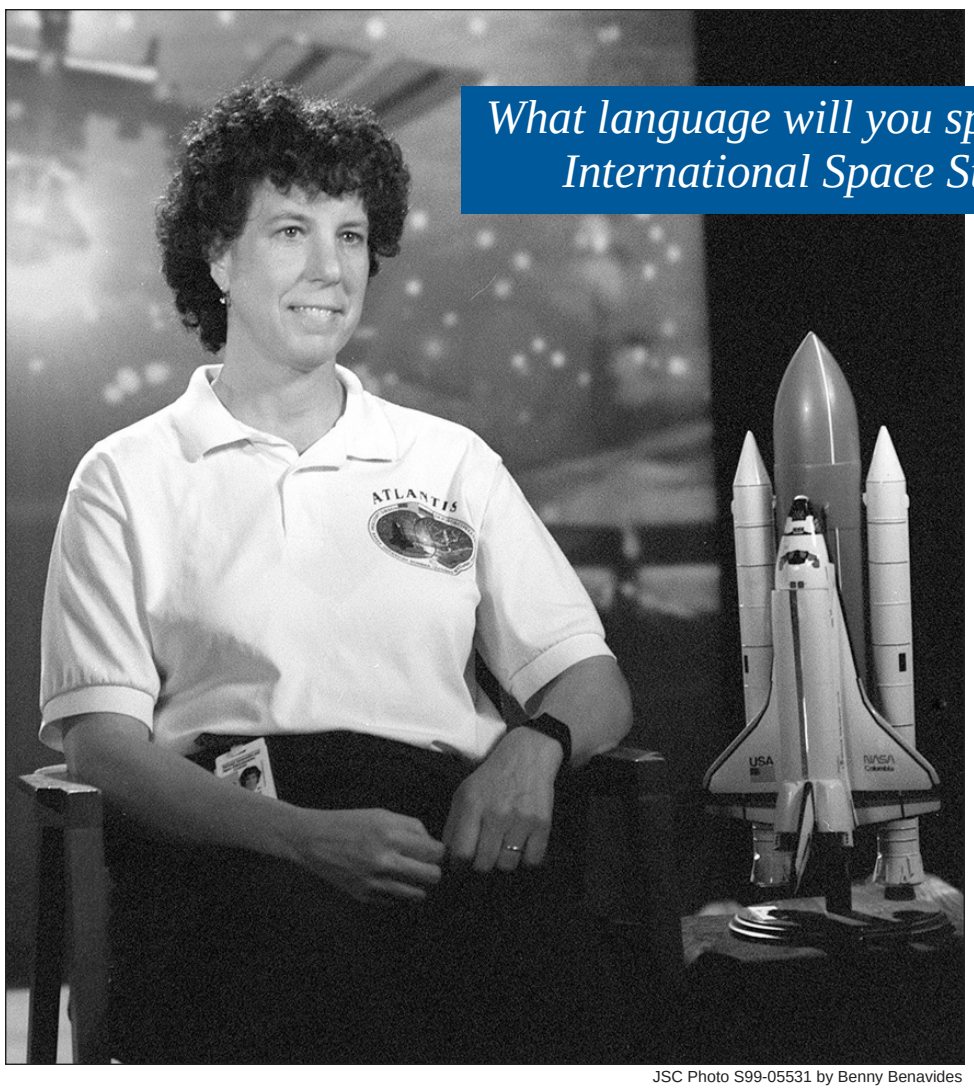
COMMUNITY NEWS

NASA TV makes contact with Cosmosphere

By Nicole Cloutier



What language will you speak on the International Space Station?

JSC Photo S99-05531 by Benny Benavides

Astronaut Dr. Ellen Baker prepares for an interactive videoconferenece with students at the Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center. Through NASA TV, Baker and Astronaut Bill Shepherd shared their space flight experiences with more than 230 students at the Cosmosphere.

That was one of many questions asked by Kansas students celebrating International Space Day May 6. More than 230 elementary and high school students gathered in the Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center for the event, and through NASA TV, were able to direct questions to Astronauts Bill Shepherd and Dr. Ellen Baker via real-time satellite video.

"It's thrilling," said Helen Unruh, director of special projects for the Kansas Cosmosphere. "It's not what you'd expect to find here in the open prairies of Kansas and the kids love it."

The students, mostly first through fourth graders, are more educated about the space program than you might think. As neighbors to the Kansas Cosmosphere, which opened in 1981, they are close to a facility quickly becoming the most comprehensive space museum in the world. The Cosmosphere's extensive collection of U.S. and Russian space artifacts includes the Apollo 13 command module, German V-1 and V-2 rockets, a SR-71 Blackbird, and Mercury and Gemini spacecraft.

And while the Kansas center also boasts of possessing the planet's largest collection of space suits, it is short of live astronauts. That's where NASA TV steps in.

"Using facilities and technology already installed on site, we're able to bring human space flight virtually anywhere across the country," said Bob Fitzmaurice, JSC's senior education program specialist, who facilitates events such as this. "We are only limited by our imaginations."

Not Worlds Apart

The proliferation of audiovisual technology has made it possible to share the sites and sounds of our center with audiences everywhere. For this event, NASA TV staff used a fully equipped production studio located in Bldg. 2 to stage the interactive videoconference.

"This was an excellent example of how we can use our tools on site to partner with organizations like the Cosmosphere and really bring space to students," said Fitzmaurice. "We have so many resources here, the backdrops, the shuttle and station props, dedicated speakers, and they all bring space to life for the students."

And for students like those in rural Kansas, getting a glimpse of the space program, or talking to an astronaut, can inspire a lifetime of dreams.

"It's fabulous," said Jessica Schrock, 17, a sophomore who attends a Magnet school at the Cosmosphere and was present for the videoconference on Space Day. "We have only 23 students at my original high school, and one of the other schools is in the middle of a pasture, so it's pretty neat to be able to see and listen live to an active astronaut. It's very inspiring."

Inspiring the students is the goal of the outreach and education programs.

"That is what means so much to me about this job," added Fitzmaurice. "I feel good that we, as a center, can make students feel special and provide them with an opportunity to interact with our astronauts at JSC." ■

Preflight briefing: *JASON Project alumni reunite at JSC*

By Nicole Cloutier

More than 50 JASON Project argonauts toured JSC sites as part of their 10-year reunion May 14. Argonauts are a select group of students and teachers who accompany researchers on the various JASON Project adventures.

To gear them up for JASON XI, which focuses on sea and space exploration, Astronaut Bill Shepherd, crewmember for International Space Station flight 2R, spoke to the argonauts about ISS and space exploration during a reunion banquet. The argonauts also received a tour of the Neutral Buoyancy Lab, the Mission Control Center, and the space shuttle and space station mockups, followed by a conference call with JASON Project Founder Dr. Bob Ballard and a day-long conference of work sessions and student briefings.

"Seeing each other again and sharing our different experiences, that is the most exciting part," said Matthew Reamy, a JASON IX student argonaut from Oklahoma. His reunion companions, some from as far away as Canada and Scotland, shared his sentiment.

'It brings the sense of awe and discovery back into the classroom.'

– Cindy McGlynn

JASON XI is the next planned JASON Project adventure. Entitled "Going to Extremes," the project will highlight ISS flight 2R and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Aquarius Underwater Lab activities. Approximately 25 JASON argonauts will return to JSC for flight 2R in February to participate in a joint live broadcast with argonauts at the Aquarius Lab in Florida. The JASON teams will be investigating how the two sites allow researchers to go beyond physical limitations to study the unknown.

"The best part of the JASON Project is that it breaks down the walls of the classroom," said Cindy McGlynn, a teacher and argonaut from New York. "It brings the sense of awe and discovery back into the classroom." ■

JSC Photo S99-05563 by Benny Benavides

JASON Project argonauts convene at JSC to celebrate their 10-year reunion.